



# The Land Ethic

Imagine, for a moment, our remaining unbuilt landscapes and rural community character “gradually disappearing under the blanket of conventional development.”<sup>1</sup> We value our unique landscapes too much to allow them to be “cleared, graded, and converted to standard subdivisions”<sup>2</sup> and generally uninspired development. In pursuing the long-term goals expressed in our vision for Coconino County’s future, we have an ethical obligation to the land. This obligation, or “land ethic,” applies to everyone—not just to the government or to nonprofit organizations, but to private landowners as well. Aldo Leopold tells us:<sup>3</sup>

Whatever may be the equation for men and land, it is improbable that we as yet know all its terms. The answer, if there is any, seems to be in a land ethic, or some other force which assigns more obligation to the private landowner.

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants and animals, or collectively: the land. A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of the land.

Health is the capacity of the land for self-renewal. Conservation is our effort to understand and preserve this capacity. It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, and a high regard for its value. By value, I of course mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense.

A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

These concepts are integral to the *Coconino County Comprehensive Plan*, which builds on our strength as community and establishes a solid set of conservation guidelines that allows us to achieve our vision. Assuming responsibility for the future of our lands is the first step in encouraging the kinds of quality development that will ensure the county’s long-term value as a place of unsurpassed natural beauty and unique cultural resources.



**ALDO LEOPOLD**

*"That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics."*

